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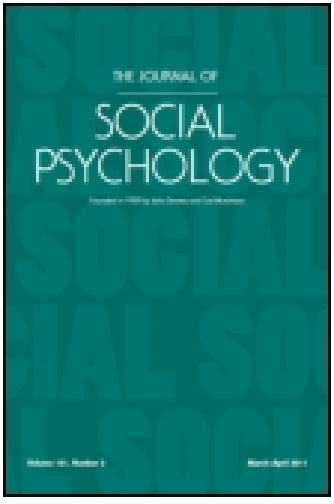

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A Comparative Study of Radio and Face-to-Face Stimulus Situations

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RADIO AND FACE-TO-FACE STIMULUS SITUATIONS*

Princeton University

HADLEY CANTRIL

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In spite of the obvious significance of radio as a media of mass communication and in spite of its novelty as a stimulus situation, comparatively little research has been directed to the unique psychological problems radio has created. The findings reported in the literature have in the main been obtained from laboratory investigations (1), while the vast array of studies involving radio in its everyday life setting have been conducted by educators, broadcasters, or advertisers for whom the psychological problems of the medium are merely incidental.[1]

The investigation reported here is an attempt to analyze one problem in the psychology of radio without distorting the problem itself by forcing it into the laboratory. The problem is the comparison of two social stimulus situations: listening to a discussion over the radio and listening to it as a member of a face-to-face, congregate group.

METHOD

With the cooperation of Mr. George V. Denny, Jr., Director of *America's Town Meeting of the Air*,[2] a weekly network feature of the National Broadcasting Company, arrangements were made to compare the reactions of people who participated as audience members

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[1]Cf. *Education on the Air* (Yearbooks, edited by J. H. MacLatchy), Columbus: Ohio State University Press; *Radio and Education* (Yearbooks, edited by L. Tyson), Chicago: University of Chicago Press; F. H. Lumley, *Measurement in Radio*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1934; H. S. Hettinger, *A Decade of Radio Advertising*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933.

[2]This Forum is sponsored by the National Broadcasting Company under the auspices of The League for Political Education. It is broadcast from the Town Hall in New York City. Discussions are stimulated by prepared talks of selected authorities. There is no censorship or "editorial policy" influencing the program. It is estimated that several million people hear the broadcast which was recently voted the most popular educational program on the air by the Women's National Radio Committee.

in the Town Hall broadcast with the reactions of radio listeners. The Town Hall program was chosen for analysis since it has demonstrated its popularity as a sustaining feature and since its discussions aim to convey to the radio audience as well as to the Forum audience the genuine flavor of a realistic town meeting.

A mimeographed questionnaire containing about 50 questions and a short attitude scale tapping the conservatism of the listeners' opinions was distributed to 1000 people attending the Forum discussions. Another questionnaire with the attitude scale was distributed to the same number of radio listeners.[3] Thirty-five questions on each questionnaire were identical, the rest being designed especially for the separate groups. Each questionnaire was accompanied by an addressed, stamped envelope and a signed letter requesting cooperation.[4] These factors, in addition to the selection of populations that had shown a definite interest in the broadcasts, accounted for the high percentage of returns. Five hundred and thirteen questionnaires were returned by the members of the Forum audience; 456 by the radio listeners.

The final tabulation of the data revealed certain differences in the composition of the two audiences. The Forum audience was younger than the radio audience. As measured by telephone and automobile ownership the Forum audience represented a lower income group. It was also more liberal in its social philosophy. Approximately two-thirds of each audience consisted of men.

Results

The questionnaires and the results obtained are given in Tables 1, 2, and 3. All figures represent the percentage of individuals in each group who answered the question as indicated.

[3]The names and addresses of thousands of listeners who have written in for information, booklets and the like are on file in the Town Hall. The names selected for this study were weighted geographically only, the final list containing a large number of listeners from the New York and New Jersey areas since the majority of those who attended the broadcast lived nearby.

[4]The writer wishes to thank the Bureau of Educational Research at Teachers College, Columbia University, for its contribution of funds to defray the expense of postage.

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TABLE 1

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MEMBERS OF FORUM AUDIENCES ONLY

		Percentage answering
1.	Have you ever taken part in the Forum discussion? If yes, give your reason for speaking:	
	Yes	22
	No	78
	To defend my point of view	20
	To explain some point to members of the Forum	34
	To be heard on the radio	4
	To ask a question	42
2.	Would you enjoy the Town Hall Forum more if it were not broadcast	
	Yes	12
	No	88
3.	Do you enjoy being on the radio program, even though perhaps only your clapping is heard?	
	Yes	26
	No	6
	Makes no difference	66
4.	Do you think time passes more quickly when you	
	Listen to the Town Hall on the radio	20
	Attend the Forum yourself	80
5.	Is it more exciting to hear the Forum	
	On the radio	20
	As a member of the audience	80
6.	Do you think you listen to the discussions more critically and logically when you are	
	Listening over the radio	30
	A member of the Forum audience	70
7.	Are you more easily swayed by a Forum speaker's point of view when you are	
	Listening over the radio	21
	A member of the Forum audience	79
8.	Do you think your attendance at a Town Hall broadcast has increased your enjoyment of an interest in the program when you hear it on the radio?	
	Yes	81
	No difference	15
	Decreased radio enjoyment	4
9.	Do you think the discussion period before the broadcast increases your interest in the program and in the arguments of the platform speakers?	
	Yes	91
	No difference	8
	Decreases interest in later program	1
10.	When you hear the Town Hall Forum on the radio, do you miss the discussion you heard in the Forum audience when you attended the broadcast?	
	Yes	91
	No	9
11.	Do you think it is easier to boo and hiss some speakers than others, even though they may say about the same things?	
	Yes	68
	No	32

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TABLE 2

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RADIO LISTENERS ONLY

	Percentage answering
1. Why do you listen to the Town Hall Programs (check as many as you like):	
To keep abreast of contemporary affairs	73
To increase my factual information	63
To learn new points of view	79
To hear my own point of view criticized	55
To hear my own point of view expressed	46
To hear an impartial discussion of a modern problem	78
To stimulate my thinking	66
Because there is no better program at that hour	13
2. Do you like to hear the forum audience applaud?	
Yes	77
No	23
3. Do you like to hear the forum audience hiss and boo the speakers?	
Yes	36
No	64
4. Are you usually doing something else when you listen to the Town Hall program?	
Yes	11
No	89
5. Would you like a Town Hall forum in your own town?	
Yes	75
No	6
Indifferent	19
6. Would you like to attend the Town Hall broadcasts?	
Yes	86
No	14
If yes, why?	
Chiefly to see the broadcast	8
To make the forum more real and complete	50
To see famous speakers	30
To have a chance to talk over the radio as a member of the audience	12
7. Do you think the Town Hall program would be as interesting to you if there were only a studio audience of about 15 people instead of the regular audiences of several hundred people?	
No	72
Yes	17
Makes no difference	11
8. When you are listening to a speaker do you have a mental picture of his appearance?	
Always	21
Usually	41
Sometimes	31
Never	7

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TABLE 2 (*continued*)

9. Do you have a mental picture of the whole Town Hall setting?	
Always	39
Usually	32
Sometimes	18
Never	11
10. When you are listening to the Town Hall discussions, do you wish you were a member of the forum audience so you could actively join the discussion by presenting your own opinions and arguments?	
Always	21
Usually	18
Sometimes	46
Never	15
11. Do you feel thwarted when you have something to say and you cannot speak out like the members of the audience?	
Always	15
Usually	13
Sometimes	44
Never	28
12. Do you feel relieved when someone in the forum brings up a point of view or an argument or asks a question that you had in mind?	
Yes	92
No	1
Makes no difference	7

TABLE 3

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR BOTH GROUPS

	Percentage answering	
	Forum Audience	Radio Listeners
1. Do you like best those Town Hall programs where there is		
Lots of excitement and controversy—with accompanying applause and boos	58	41
Only mild enthusiasm—with each speaker given time to finish his point but with some audience reaction indicated	27	40
Calm and dignified Forum with no interruptions or emotional outbursts	15	19
2. What do you think is about the right length of time for a member of the *audience* to speak?		
Less than one minute	19	28
From one to two minutes	59	48
From two to four minutes	19	13
From four to six minutes	3	11

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TABLE 3 (*continued*)

	Percentage answering	
	Forum Audience	Radio Listeners
3. Do you think a speaker from the *audience* should		
Merely present his point of view	43	50
Outline his reasons for the point of view he expresses	43	33
Give a clear analysis of his position	14	17
4. Do you like the Forum discussion best when		
Almost every speaker introduces a new subject for discussion	6	2
The speakers talk about the same general idea but express many different points of view	38	39
Speakers divide themselves into two camps, those "for" and those "against"	32	39
Members of the audience chiefly ask questions of the platform speakers	24	20
5. Would you rather hear an argument or an expression of opinion by a speaker at the Town Hall Forum?		
Argument	63	48
Opinion	37	52
6. When a member of the audience of the platform expresses your own point of view, do you		
Feel that he is representing you	47	43
Tend to identify yourself with him	53	57
Neither	0	0
7. Do you prefer to listen to speakers with whom you agree or disagree or doesn't it make any difference?		
Agree	18	24
Disagree	25	15
No difference	57	61
8. How much more are you interested in a program if very well-known (rather than comparatively unknown) people are speaking?		
Much more interested	70	56
Slightly more interested	20	27
Not at all more interested	10	17
9. In general, are you more interested in the *topic* up for discussion or the *speakers* who will discuss the topic?		
Topic	85	65
Speakers	15	35
10. Do you prefer to have the questions of the members of the audience to the platform speakers?		
Written by the audience member and read by the moderator	20	37
Asked by the audience member himself	62	46
Makes no difference	18	17

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TABLE 3 (*continued*)

	Percentage answering	
	Forum Audience	Radio Listeners
11. Do you like to know the names of the members of the audience who ask questions?		
Yes	13	26
No	34	22
Makes no difference	53	52
12. Do you continue the discussion of the Town Hall topic with friends or relatives after the Forum has ended?		
Always	28	24
Usually	50	32
Sometimes	20	42
Never	2	2
13. Do you follow up the Forum discussions with relevant reading?		
Always	11	11
Usually	24	25
Sometimes	55	54
Never	10	10
14. Do you prefer to hear conflicting speakers on		
Same program	95	94
Different program	5	6
15. What do you consider to be the most desirable number of platform speakers for a Town Hall program?		
One	1	3
Two	44	40
Three	40	40
Four	13	14
Five	1	2
Six or more	1	1
16. Do you prefer to hear		
Two speakers argue back and forth with each other	43	53
Various points mentioned by different people	57	47
17. Do you feel that you have learned anything from the Town Hall Forums?		
Very much	37	40
Considerable	48	46
A little	14	12
Nothing at all	1	2
18. Do you think the Town Hall Forums have changed your opinions on any topics?		
Yes	34	42
No	66	58
19. Do the programs seem to you to		
Favor conservative reactionary opinions	22	20
Favor liberal and radical opinions	7	6
Be impartial	71	74

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TABLE 3 (*continued*)

	Percentage answering	
	Forum Audience	Radio Listeners
20. Do you like to have a plain, ordinary, "shirt-sleeve" citizen invited to give his opinion as a member of the radio panel?		
Yes	68	73
No	32	27
21. Do you feel such a speaker represents the unseen audience?		
Yes	52	55
No	48	45
22. Would you rather listen to the Town Hall Forum		
As a member of a radio audience	8	41
As a member of the Forum audience in N. Y.	92	59
23. How do you like the Town Hall broadcasts to end?		
With a solution reached that is agreeable to all	23	20
With the problem still wide open and no solution in sight which is acceptable to all sides	47	51
With your own point of view received most enthusiastically by members of the Forum audience, even though you know that a minority does not agree	28	28
With the point of view you do not like received most enthusiastically by members of the Forum audience, even though you know a minority agrees with you	2	1
24. Do you get more excited when your own point of view is being		
Expressed	33	40
Criticized	67	60
25. Does it seem to you that there is		
Too much reaction from the audience	20	23
About the right amount of audience reaction	74	74
Not enough audience reaction	6	3
26. Are you annoyed if a speaker uses big words?		
Always	5	5
Usually	15	10
Sometimes	46	30
Never	34	55
27. Are you annoyed if a speaker uses complicated and involved sentences?		
Always	28	29
Usually	21	17
Sometimes	40	38
Never	11	16
28. Would you like the Town Hall program as much as you do now if it were sponsored by some manufacturer and if it advertised his product?		
Yes	5	8

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TABLE 3 (*continued*)

		Percentage answering	
		Forum Audience	Radio Listeners
	No	82	80
	Makes no difference	13	12
29.	If the Town Hall Forum were sponsored by an advertiser, do you think it would be		
	More biased and one-sided than it is now	80	78
	Less biased and one-sided than it is now	0	2
	About as impartial as it is now	20	20
30.	What questions would you like to hear discussed in future Town Hall Forums? (Over 300 topics were suggested. Rank order of general problems given below.)		
	a. How to reduce unemployment		
	b. International affairs — world peace and reasons for war		
	c. Government ownership		
	d. Education		
	e. Revision of Constitution and function of Supreme Court		
	f. Communism and Russia		
	g. Economic security		
	h. Labor organization		
	i. Birth control		
	j. Free speech—teachers' oaths, freedom of press.		
	k. Socialization of medicine		
	l. Child labor		
	m. Youth—what can it do?		
	n. Negro problem		
	o. Safety on highways		
31.	Sex of audiences		
	Male	65	72
	Female	35	28
32.	Age of audiences		
	Under 21	30	6
	22-30	27	20
	31-50	32	47
	Over 50	11	27
33.	Political affiliation of audiences		
	Republican	20	36
	Democrat	21	20
	Socialist	4	6
	Communist	2	1
	Other or none	52	37
34.	Have you a telephone in your home?		
	Yes	66	80
	No	34	20
35.	Have you an automobile?		
	Yes	35	70
	No	65	30

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From the data contained in these tables at least three conclusions may be reached regarding the characteristics of radio as a stimulus situation.

1. *A radio broadcast must be regarded as a social stimulus since it arouses in the listener definite social behavior.* The evidence shows that radio listeners project themselves as participants in the discussion. The listener's personal absence from the scene of action and his one-way communication by no means completely abolish his own sense of personal involvement in the situation he is experiencing.

(*a*). All of the radio listeners, as well as those attending the Forum, say that sooner or later they identify themselves with a speaker or a member of the audience who has suggested their point of view.

(*b*). Three-fourths of the radio audience feel thwarted when they are unable to have their say in the discussion.

(*c*). Nine-tenths of the radio listeners feel relieved when someone in the audience brings up an argument or asks a question they had in mind.

(*d*). Three-fourths of the radio listeners enjoy the audience applause, presumably because it expresses vicariously their own approbation.

(*e*). Over 70 per cent of the radio audience say the broadcast would be less interesting to hear if a studio audience replaced the regular audience of several hundred participants. They like the feeling of taking part in a real, contemporary discussion.

(*f*). All of the radio listeners become at least mildly excited when their own point of view is being expressed or criticized.

(*g*). Only a very few listeners like to have a point of view opposing theirs received enthusiastically by the audience.

(*h*). The majority like to have a plain, ordinary, shirt-sleeve citizen invited to give his opinion during the discussion; over half of the listeners feel that such a speaker represents them.

2. *As a social stimulus the radio situation is less complete than the face-to-face situation.*

(*a*). Almost nine-tenths of the radio listeners say they would like to attend the broadcast. The main reason they give is that attendance would make the situation more real. Eighty-five per cent of the radio audience would at times like to join the discussion.

(*b*). Time passes more slowly for the radio listeners, probably

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because it is less filled. They want shorter periods allotted each speaker, while four-fifths of those who have both attended the Forum and heard the broadcast say that time goes more quickly in the former situation.

(*c*). The comparative incompleteness of the radio situation is shown by the attempt on the part of the listener to supplement the complete Forum picture with his own imagery. The great majority of the listeners have an image of both the whole Town Hall setting and of the speakers.

(*d*). Radio listeners are less interested in learning the names of those members of the audience who ask questions and a comparatively small percentage of them prefer to have the question asked by the audience member rather than sent in to the moderator. The whole discussion seems to be more closely riveted to the microphone for the radio listener, a factor which would tend to decrease the completeness of the actual Forum situation.

3. *The comparative incompleteness of the radio situation decreases the intensity of interest in the content of the broadcast.* Although part of the greater interest shown by the members of the Forum audience was no doubt due to the preliminary discussion that goes on in the Town Hall before the broadcast and part to the fact that those who attend the discussion are likely to be led there by pre-established enthusiasms, the characteristic configuration of the face-to-face situation seems to play a rôle in arousing closer participation.

(*a*). Fewer radio listeners than Forum members say they like best programs that have lots of excitement and controversy accompanied by applause and boos.

(*b*). The great majority of audience members say that it is more exciting to attend the discussion than to hear it on the radio.

(*c*). Those in the Forum audience would rather hear a person give reasons for his point of view than a mere expression of his point of view; the radio listeners are not so interested in reasons.

(*d*). Members of the Forum audience are more interested in the topic up for discussion than are the radio listeners.

(*e*). Almost three-fourths of those who have participated in both situations say that they listen less critically to the radio than to the actual discussion.

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Attitudes of the Listeners

The attitude scale contained in the questionnaire showed that the two populations divided themselves as follows:[5]

	Forum Audience	Radio Listeners
Radical	18.3	9.6
Liberal	21.4	21.2
Neutral	43.9	43.4
Conservative	12.2	16.5
Reactionary	4.2	9.3

The reason for including the attitude scale was to learn what relationship existed between the listener's general social attitude and

[5]The conservatism of the attitudes of both groups was obtained by the answers to the questionnaire given below. The individual was asked to check the opinion that most nearly represented his own. Five competent judges scored the opinions in the scale according to the categories, radical, liberal, neutral, conservative and reactionary. The scale used here does not, of course, pretend to be refined or standardized. But for the purposes of the experiment it was believed to be quite adequate and it did have the merit of brevity (2).

The New Deal

. . . In general, I am in favor of most of the New Deal policies.
. . . I think the New Deal is too socialistic and radical.
. . . I think the New Deal is not socialistic enough.

Soviet Russia

. . . The present Russian government is a menace to good government in the rest of the world.
. . . I am highly in favor of most of the principles of the Soviet government.
. . . I am neither for nor against the Soviet experiment but am merely trying to understand it impartially.

Amending the Constitution

. . . We should make it harder to amend the Constitution.
. . . We should make it easier to amend the Constitution.
. . . We should scrap the Constitution as a hindrance to progressive government.
. . . We should leave the Constitution and its regulation for changes exactly as they are.

Government Ownership

. . . Government ownership of land, properties, and industries should be prevented at all cost.
. . . Governments should own and operate only those enterprises that will not yield a profit to individual entrepreneurs.
. . . Governments should be allowed to compete freely with private industries.
. . . Governments should own and control all utilities and raw materials that might produce monopolies.
. . . Governments should own and control almost all of the economic resources of the nation.

TABLE 4

RELATION OF GENERAL SOCIAL ATTITUDE TO CERTAIN SPECIFIC OPINIONS

	Percentages Forum Audience					*Percentages* Radio Listeners				
	Radical	Liberal	Neutral	Conservative	Reactionary	Radical	Liberal	Neutral	Conservative	Reactionary
Do you think the Forums have changed your opinions on any topics?										
Yes	*21*	30	37	47	33	*23*	33	*55*	36	40
No	*79*	70	63	53	67	77	67	*45*	64	60
Do the programs seem to you to										
Favor conservatives	16	*27*	15	20	*0*	13	*41*	7	19	6
Favor radicals	1	8	7	20	30	9	3	12	5	17
Be impartial	83	*65*	78	60	*70*	78	*56*	81	*76*	*77*
Do you get more excited when your own point of view is being										
Expressed	*41*	28	39	39	*86*	47	40	39	37	*54*
Criticized	*86*	72	61	61	*14*	53	60	61	63	*46*
Would you like the program as much if it were sponsored by manufacturer?										
Yes	3	2	6	0	8	4	6	9	7	15
No	*97*	79	78	74	*59*	91	88	81	72	61
No difference	*0*	19	16	26	*33*	5	6	10	*21*	*24*
If Forum were sponsored, do you think it would be										
More biased	*91*	*69*	76	91	*67*	85	86	82	64	64
Less biased	0	0	0	0	0	6	1	1	3	0
About same as now	*9*	*31*	24	9	*33*	9	13	17	*33*	*36*

certain opinions expressed in the questionnaire. Table 4 gives the relationships obtained. All figures represent the percentage of listeners who fell within the attitudinal grouping indicated.

Several significant conclusions may be derived from Table 4.

1. Those who feel that they have changed their opinions *least* as a result of the broadcasts are the radicals; those who have changed their opinions *most* are the neutrals in the radio audience. This

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is, of course, what one should expect since individuals with a consistent and fixed frame of reference are not so amenable to suggestion and argument.

2. Most people think the Town Hall discussions are impartial, although liberals tend to the belief that they favor conservatives while reactionaries and conservatives see a liberal bias. "Objectivity" here, as elsewhere, apparently depends upon one's own presuppositions.

3. In general, members of both audiences are more affected by criticism of their point of view than by the expression of it. Presumably such criticism arouses tension which cannot possibly be effectively released by members of the radio audience and which is usually repressed by Forum members because of their embarrassment in speaking before a large assembly.

4. Those who get most excited when their point of view is being *criticized* are the radical members of the Forum audience; those who get most excited when their point of view is being *expressed* are the reactionaries in the Forum audience. Apparently the radical, impatient with those who obstruct social change, is more readily affected by those who oppose him than by those who flatter him. Furthermore the radical, being younger and always a member of a minority group, doubtless feels a greater personal responsibility for defending a point of view opposed by those with accepted prestige who represent the majority status quo and who are with him in a congregate group. The reactionary, on the other hand, has a more complacent stereotype that enjoys approval and is not dislodged by criticism.

5. The great majority of both audiences believe that they would not like the Town Hall program as well if it were sponsored by a manufacturer. Almost all agree that such a situation would produce greater bias in a program whose chief virtue is its freedom for expression. Significantly enough, however, the conservatives and reactionaries believe that commercial sponsorship of the program would make less difference to them and would have little effect on its impartiality.

Educational Value of the Forum

Most of the listeners state that they attend the Forum or tune in to the broadcast because they want to hear new points of view.

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Half of them like the discussion to end with no acceptable solution to the problem in sight, although about one-third like the broadcast to end with their own point of view in the ascendant. The majority in both audiences believe they have not changed their attitudes after the broadcasts but do feel that they have learned a good deal from them. Apparently this discussion, like most discussions, is merely a way of providing information and arguments with which one can further rationalize his own presuppositions.

When the listeners were asked what topics they would like to hear discussed in future Town Hall Forums, they returned over 300 different questions. The obvious care which most listeners took in answering this question and the vital topics submitted indicate that such a program satisfies a genuine need in the circumscribed environment of the average citizen and that there are many problems, such as government ownership, birth control, and the socialization of medicine, that he would like to have considered and that are not now adequately discussed on the radio or in the newspaper because of the fear of offending vested interests.

Interpretations

From the data obtained in this study we may draw several conclusions of interest to systematic social psychology.

1. Social situations, like all other stimulus situations, have their own configurations or structurations (3). The characteristic pattern of a social stimulus situation will at least partially determine the way in which an individual will respond to it. Compared to the face-to-face situation in a congregate group, the radio situation is more well-structured, more of a complete whole, since it is not so readily broken up into a series of beginnings and endings by the gestures of the speaker, the sight and sound of others in the group, or any of the visual stimuli available to the members of a congregate audience. However, to account for the differences between listening to a speaker and to a loudspeaker merely in terms of social facilitation, visual or auditory stimuli is to ignore basic facts in the psychology of perception which hold in social life as well as in the psychological experiment on the isolated individual. Such factors are merely specific and inseparable parts of the total pattern. Because of the characteristic structure of the radio stimulus, the listener is more susceptible to prestige suggestion, is less analytical, thinks

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radio time passes comparatively slowly, and is less enthusiastic than the face-to-face listener (1).

2. The characteristics of the pattern of a social situation may, however, be completely altered or outweighed by preëstablished frames of reference or internal—as opposed to external—structurations which the individual may bring to the stimulus. Thus *some* radio listeners are more excitable, more attentive, and more critical to the Town Hall discussions than some Forum members because their attitudes predispose them to such behavior. In general, where the sense of personal involvement is great, the pattern of the stimulus situation loses its determining effect. Ardent followers of President Roosevelt are likely to be more interested in one of his broadcasts than in a speech by a critic of the administration which they might attend in person. The war news broadcast to the people of Madrid completely overshadows interest in local orators.

3. Radio's value as a medium of communication is due to the fact that it arouses in the listener a sense of social participation (1). It is not only information or entertainment that the listener craves. These he could get from any number of other sources. What he wants is an enlargement of his own psychological universe. This radio provides par excellence because it brings him bits of the universe which are not only distant in space and otherwise inaccessible but which are contemporaneous in time. The listener's vicarious participation in events brought him by radio is due in part to the characteristics of the medium which make such participation possible and in part to the conscious or unconscious attitude of participation he assumes when he tunes in.

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